

The Evolution of Technology in Breath Alcohol Technician Training and Testing

Technology in breath alcohol testing and Breath Alcohol Technician (BAT) training has developed over the years to include many new options. Back in 1995, when DOT training regulations were first enacted, training was limited to the classroom setting only, where the latest technologies to be found were PowerPoint and overhead projectors. Today, more than 40% of testing facilities use some kind of electronic application to manage their breath testing programs¹, and online training is becoming more and more popular due to market demands and an overall trend toward online technology.

Electronic Alcohol Testing Forms (eATFs), web-based applications for program management, and online training are all relatively recent developments that help streamline the testing process.



It is natural to be excited about the opportunities that technological advancements create, but it is also wise to remain cognizant of how new technologies could affect the integrity of your testing program, and choose solutions accordingly.

For example, we all know that proper training of the DOT rules and regulations, instrument proficiency, and mock tests are imperative to the success of a testing program. One mistake by the BAT and the integrity of a positive test situation is questionable, or possibly deemed invalid. Therefore, it is imperative that the **QUALITY** of a training program should be evaluated first and foremost over the manner in which the training is provided (ie. in a classroom or online).

With a good understanding of the testing program platforms and training options that are available today, your testing facility can determine the best fit for a quality, defensible breath alcohol testing program. This article will show some recent developments in online BAT training and paperless testing, and how you can successfully include them in your testing program.

Online BAT Training

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) alcohol testing requirements became effective for employers in 1995/1996. These regulations required all Breath Alcohol Technicians to be trained to a specific curriculum. In the beginning, classroom training was the only option, BAT training was a 2-day process, and it usually required extensive travel on behalf of the participants.

Around the year 2001, the industry saw the first electronic DOT rules and regulations training modules. These CD-ROM based, and later online, modules

were designed to shorten a 2-day classroom process to a 1-day class. A student, who in the past may have been hampered by travel and time restraints, could now simply log in at any place and time and get an education on the DOT Rules and Regulations in a "Virtual Classroom."

Keep in mind that delivering the procedural portion of BAT training online does not relieve the trainer of the responsibility to follow DOT requirements. For example, DOT continues to require new BAT students to spend 6 ½ hours completing a rules and regulations course, and refresher BATs to spend 2–3 hours.² It is not acceptable to just "rubber stamp" the BAT training with a brief overview of rules and procedures.

The next evolution of BAT training technology was the incorporation of online instrument proficiency instruction into its learning management systems. While we have found that many online BAT training programs will skip this portion of the training, and take the students directly into the mock tests, we strongly believe that an online program should emphasize proficiency in the use of the instrument that will be used during their alcohol collections.

Finally, the last hurdle to overcome for development of a completely online BAT training experience was to find a quality way to include the DOT-required 7 monitored mock tests in the online study modules. In the not so distant past, the mock-test portion was often required to be in-person, even if the rest of the BAT training (rules and regulations and instrument proficiency) was completed online. However, market demands increasingly pressured trainers to find a way to successfully implement the monitored mock tests into their online modules.

The obvious main challenge when conducting instrument proficiency training and mock tests online is that the instructor must be able to monitor the student in real time as the mock tests are being conducted. This means that the student must have someone to act as a mock donor for all tests. After experimenting with Skype for observation of mock tests, we have found that video conferencing utilizing an external, adjustable camera to be a better solution. This method also allows for use of presentations to review processes and explanations with the donor before each mock test.

When considering online BAT training options, we have found it to

be imperative that the student has an actual EBT instrument with them when going through the self-study material. It is extremely important that the student practice with the device before attempting any mock tests. A good trainer should also be able to show the correct way to handle many different testing scenarios such as positive results, refusals, accuracy checks, equipment malfunctions, etc.—through a combination of online self-study modules and a video conference session.

In summary, prospective BATs, and their employers, should evaluate online testing programs the same way that they would evaluate classroom programs. Cost is





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We encourage clients to come to a classroom training if at all possible. But we also believe that, when classroom training just isn't possible, a quality and thorough online training program from a reputable vendor is your next best bet.

certainly one factor, but when you consider what is on the line if a BAT team is poorly trained, cost concerns should be trumped by quality, quality, and quality!

Some best practices to follow:

- Make sure that the vendor that produced the online training has a long track record of providing quality training.
- Ask peer companies for references if you are not sure.
- Make sure that the program that you choose has an instrument proficiency module. As mentioned above, we have found vendors that teach rules and regulations, and then skip right to the mock tests. How is this helpful to a student?
- Finally, make sure that if you do DOT testing (and most of us do!), that your online testing program adheres to the regulations as set out by DOT.

The Rise of Electronic Alcohol Testing Forms and Paperless Testing

Although an electronic ATF form has not been approved yet for DOT breath alcohol testing, there is much agreement that this advancement is in the near future, due in large part to the approval of e-CCF systems by the DOT. A recent study showed that 83% of testing facilities questioned would implement an e-ATF if one was available and if the DOT regulations for it were set.¹

Many questions surround this technology, as have surrounded other new technologies in the breath testing field. As with any new technology, there are many advantages to an e-ATF, including streamlining the collection process, saving paper, and automatic test result data collection and dissemination. With any new technology, it becomes important to preserve the integrity of the collection process and this should be a primary goal of the e-ATF advancement. Proper training on the new technology will also be critical to a quality testing program.

While the eATF technology is still in its infancy, and therefore choices are limited, we believe again that a platform should be evaluated solely on value it provides to supporting a quality breath testing program (there's that word again... quality). For instance, will the platform allow you to send the eATF to the DER in a proper manner? Will it support a mobile testing program? Will it work in conjunction with a tried and true breath testing instrument? Does it adhere to the rules set out by DOT? How will training be accomplished?

Conclusion

Emerging technologies are certainly exciting and welcomed by most testing facilities and training entities; however, we do need to be vigilant in our processes and training to ensure that the breath testing process is as flawless

as possible. New advancements should enhance this goal, rather than restrain it.

Training is still key to a defensible program, and that nothing is quite as thorough and high-quality as in-person, classroom training. We encourage clients to come to a classroom training if at all possible. But we also believe that, when classroom training just isn't possible, a quality and thorough online training program from a reputable vendor is your next best bet.

Don't settle for just "quick, cheap, or convenient" when choosing your training program and testing technology options. These are the backbone of your testing program, and as such deserve to be given the utmost consideration. ■

References

- ¹ 2015 Survey by Intoximeters
- ² Source: Breath Alcohol Technician Training: DOT Model Course, 4/6/2011, page 5



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